

## **Sacredise Daily Worship**

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
25 June – 01 July 2017

### **Thought for the Week:**

We all face moments of decision when we have to choose whether to preserve our lives through silence and compliance, or to endure ridicule, persecution and rejection for speaking out for what we believe is right. These decisions are often much smaller, but more significant, than we may realise. When we refuse to laugh at racist, homophobic or chauvinistic jokes, we put ourselves in the firing line. When we stand alongside those whom others want to judge and reject, we risk being rejected and judged ourselves. When we refuse to participate in acts of violence against our “enemies” we may be seen as traitors. When we embrace beliefs and values that are different from the “norm” we may be disowned or excommunicated.

Yet, if we fail to stand up for our convictions, we lose something of our souls, and we contribute to making the world unsafe and threatening for anyone who is “different” in any way. While it may hurt to live out the welcoming, peaceful, and justice-seeking values of God’s Reign, to fail to do so hurts us and our world far more. This is why the Lectionary challenges us to love the Gospel above all – for only then will we live as people who truly and selflessly love family, friends, neighbours, and even enemies, as God calls us to.

This week we explore the uncomfortable call of Jesus, and we embrace the cost in our quest to receive and share God's life.

### **Sunday 25 June 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 10:24-39

**Reflection:** On the surface today’s reading may sound like the peace-loving, inclusive Jesus is advocating violence and division in God's name. These words are part of a larger sermon which was to prepare the twelve apostles to be sent out in Jesus' name. For the writer of Matthew, these words would also have been written to encourage to his readers who were seeking to live the Jesus way in a time of persecution, uncertainty, and conflict. With this background

information in mind, we can hear more clearly what Jesus meant.

Jesus had been accused of being a servant of evil, and he assured his followers that they would experience the same persecution. But, rather than fear persecution, the disciples really needed to fear God. In other words, it would be a far worse thing to lose our faith than to lose our lives. But, our commitment to Christ will often set us at odds with those who reject Jesus' way. Some of these opponents may even be in our own homes. If we try to avoid the pain and conflict (saving our lives) we will actually lose our connection with the God who gives us life. But if we willingly give ourselves for Christ's sake, we will know fullness of life. So, we need to love Jesus and his way more than anything else, or we will never know God's life, and we will never learn to love as Jesus did – which is what will make us able to love our families, and our enemies, in the best way possible.

How can you grow to love the way of Jesus a little more today?

**Practice for Today:** We learn to love that to which we give our attention and energy. So, if we are to love Jesus’ way more than anything, we will need to give it our energy and attention. As we study the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, our hearts are captured by Jesus' vision of God's Reign and we learn to give our lives for it. This then inspires how we live and love. Make time today to study Jesus' message and mission, and let it shape your life a little more.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I study the Scriptures, O God, may your Reign capture my heart and shape my life.

### **Monday 26 June 2017**

**Reading:** Revelation 2:1-7

**Reflection:** Today's reading is one of the letters to the seven churches of the Revelation. The church at Ephesus, was a faithful and hard working community, living through great suffering and persecution. Jesus commended the courage and endurance of this church in the face of these challenges, and praised them for their commitment to the truth, and their strong opposition to the Nicolaitan heresy. But, there was one issue that Christ confronted strongly – they had lost their first love. The New Living Translation expresses this as a lack in their love for God and one another. It seems that, in all their striving and endurance, the Ephesian Christians had fallen

into a passionless, loveless faith that was "right" and hard working, but had lost its power and its capacity to care.

The natural response to times of grief and pain is to withdraw and protect our hearts. We may go through the motions of following Christ, gathering with a community, sharing in prayer and worship, and even serving others, but we may keep ourselves safe from any relationship that could make us vulnerable. We may grow cold and distant, and refuse to allow others, or even God, into our heart. Though it may take everything we've got just to survive, falling into this kind of self-protective behaviour robs us of the healing and strengthening power of love. In addition, we miss out on the gifts of wisdom, courage, strength, and grace which our suffering can offer. In this sense, we may act in seemingly Christlike ways, but the real power of our faith is lost and we need to be called back to our "first love" – the faith that puts love for God and others first in our lives.

Have you lost your first love in any way? How can you respond to Christ's call to return to your first love today?

**Practice for Today:** When we lose our passion for our faith, and begin to struggle in our ability to love God and others, we need to engage in practices that nurture love and that renew our strength in the way of Jesus. All the spiritual disciplines can offer us these gifts, but today the practice of meditation may be particularly helpful. In meditation we come to God in stillness and open ourselves to receive a sense of rest and a renewed sense of God's presence and love. Make some time today to be still and to meditate on God's love for you, and allow this to inspire love in your heart a little more.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I rest in your presence, O God, and I open my heart to be inspired in love again.

## **Tuesday 27 June 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 86:11-17

**Reflection:** The amazing paradox of Jesus' message is that, while God's dream is cosmic and dramatic, it is established through the simple, ordinary actions of ordinary people in each ordinary day. This truth is reflected in today's Psalm, where the Psalmist prays that God would teach him God's ways, give him a pure heart, and inspire him to give glory to God. This is the heart of the Christ-

following life – walking with integrity in God's ways, and growing in love for God and others.

It may be surprising that living by these simple principles could bring us into conflict with others, but that's what we see in this Psalm. The Psalmist cries out to God because violent people have threatened him. According to the writer God means "nothing to them", which means that God's ways, which subvert the self-interested culture of our world, are offensive to these antagonists. Yet, the Psalmist continues to trust in God's mercy and strength, and this empowers him to stay faithful in spite of the opposition. Again, the basic principle for us to follow is simple. We won't win everyone over, and our faithfulness to Christ will, at times, lead us into confrontation with those who oppose the values of the kingdom, but through it all, we are to trust in God's grace and stay true to the call to love.

Where does your commitment to Christ bring you into conflict with others? How can you allow God's grace and strength to keep you loving and faithful?

**Practice for Today:** When we seek to bring glory to God, it's not just about giving God the honour which is due to God. It's also about opening ourselves to learn to follow God's ways and nurture a pure and loving heart. The practice of praise, in which we express our awe and celebration of God, also reveals God's nature, and changes us to reflect God's loving, gracious character to the world. Today, give God glory through your praises, and then through reflecting God's love to everyone you encounter.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, for your loving, gracious ways, and I seek to reflect your glory through my life.

## **Wednesday 28 June 2017**

**Reading:** Jeremiah 38:1-13

**Reflection:** The prophet Jeremiah did not plan to be a trouble-maker. He was simply inspired to speak truth to those in power. As he watched the strategies and decisions that the leaders of God's people were making, he saw that the result would be disaster for the nation. He also realised that the threatening Babylonians would deal harshly with resistance. The situation had gone too far for God's people to avoid catastrophe, but they could still decide how to

respond to the inevitable. Jeremiah's recommendation was for them to surrender and stay alive, rather than to fight and die. This was not a call to run away from the difficulty of following God's ways. It was a challenge to accept the consequences of their disobedience. It was a wise and compassionate message, but the leaders were angry that the prophet should dare to suggest this course of action. In order to try and silence Jeremiah, they placed him in solitary confinement in the worst of conditions. Fortunately, though, Jeremiah had friends and defenders, and so he was ultimately taken back to a normal prison.

Sometimes it is easier and safer to stay silent when our perspectives differ from those of the people around us. Being a lone dissenting voice can be hard, and it can have painful consequences. But, our silence is not noble, and it does not bring life. We may be ostracised or persecuted, but unless God's people speak up for God's values and priorities, the world will continue to be shaped around self-interest, power games, and short-sighted thinking. Speaking up does not have to be dramatic. It can be as simple as refusing to share in gossip, or refusing to participate in dishonest actions, or making a point to include those who are marginalised. But, in these small, loving ways, we can proclaim God's values.

Who needs you to speak up today? How can you do this gently and firmly?

**Practice for Today:** Speaking out, whether verbally or in action, can be a very difficult thing. This is why we need to practice it in safer situations first. And the safest, although sometimes the hardest place to speak up is as we confront the injustice and sin of our own hearts. This is the work of confession, and as we do this work, we learn to stand against evil within ourselves, so that we can then stand against evil in our part of the world. Today, use the practice of confession to speak up about your own need for change.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** There is evil in my heart, O God! I confront it and resist it in your name.

**Thursday 29 June 2017**

**Reading:** Micah 7:18-20

**Reflection:** Today, being Thursday, our focus shifts once again to

the coming Sunday. As we have explored the call of Christ, we now hear of God's saving, gracious hospitality toward us. The only way we can ever respond to Christ's call, is if we know we have a safe place with God's loving family. The prophet Micah, who is probably best known for proclaiming that God requires us simply to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God, in today's reading celebrates God's grace and hospitality. God pardons the sins of God's people, and delights in showing unfailing love. God has compassion on us and remains ever faithful in God's commitment to us.

In our walk with Jesus it is important to always keep two "movements" or rhythms in balance. The one is the way of sacrifice and service, which is taking up our crosses and embracing the struggle of living the Jesus' way. The other is the way of celebration and of resting in God's love and comfort. If we only walk the way of sacrifice, our hearts grow cold and we easily lose our joy and burn out. If we only walk the way of celebration, we may feel good, but our lives make no contribution and they become shallow and self-centred. But, when we do both, as Micah and the other prophets did, and as Jesus himself did, we receive strength and joy from the way of celebration which empowers us to walk the way of sacrifice. Then, our lives help to make the world a better place, but we don't burn out in the process.

How can you embrace both the way of sacrifice and the way of celebration today?

**Practice for Today:** The spiritual discipline which, perhaps more than any other, leads us into celebration, is thanksgiving. As we give thanks, we remember all that God has done for us, and this lightens our hearts and fills us with joy. Today, allow your thanksgiving to lead you into celebration. And let your celebration inspire you to live out the call of Christ in your life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I thank you for all you have done for me, O God, and I celebrate your life and love.

**Friday 30 June 2017**

**Reading:** Galatians 5:7-12

**Reflection:** The radical hospitality of the Gospel has always been a stumbling block for followers of Christ. In a world where we believe

people should get what they deserve, grace is offensive and even threatening. If “sinners” are not punished, and if “good” people are not rewarded, we may begin to feel like following Jesus is not worth the effort. Of course, if we’re only following Jesus in order to receive some reward, we’ve missed the point. But, in our struggle with grace, we may subtly begin to create laws and requirements for ourselves and others to follow, believing that God needs us to do certain things before we can be accepted. The idea that we can be welcomed into God’s family simply on the basis of God’s love, and not our own goodness, can take a lifetime to grasp.

The church of the Galatians struggled with grace as much as we do. There were some of the believers who insisted that anyone who came to Christ had to fulfil the Old Testament law – including circumcision. What made things worse was that these “Judaisers”, as they were known, began to say that Paul was a false teacher because he preached grace. What really made Paul angry, though, was that they were putting a barrier in the way of Gentiles experiencing the love and grace of God. His response was very strong – he wished that they would “mutilate” themselves (the Greek may be translated as “castrate”!). Paul was insistent – we only find favour with God through God’s goodness, not any goodness we might feel we have.

What rules and laws do you feel must be followed before you can receive God’s grace? How might these barriers to grace affect you and those with whom you interact today?

**Practice for Today:** It can be hard to relax into the radical welcome of God’s hospitality. But, one of the ways we learn to do this is to become radically welcoming of others, especially those who are very different from us. Today, extend your welcome to as many people, and as freely, as you can.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you welcome me unconditionally, O God, so I seek to welcome others in your name.

**Saturday 01 July 2017**

**Reading:** Luke 17:1-4

**Reflection:** Yesterday we explored how difficult it can be to accept God’s grace. Part of the reason we struggle so much is that if God

really does extend such unconditional grace to us, then we cannot avoid doing the same for others. But, it can be very hard to extend grace to those who have hurt us, especially when they hurt us repeatedly. But, in case we might try to find excuses for harbouring grudges, Jesus tackles the question of forgiveness head on.

It’s not that God’s grace creates a free-for-all where our actions don’t matter. Rather, the focus is on ensuring that our actions do no harm to others. Jesus speaks strong words against those who cause others to be tempted. When we remember that the heart of Jesus’ teaching was love for God and love for neighbour, we can be pretty sure that the temptation Jesus was referring to is the temptation to break relationship. If we cause anyone to be tempted to stop loving God or neighbour, we will experience great sorrow - which makes sense, since broken relationships always bring much pain. But, if anyone hurts us, we are to extend forgiveness to them “seven times” – which is to say, indefinitely. Forgiving another person is not “letting them off the hook”. It’s letting ourselves off the hook of trying to find our happiness and wholeness by controlling another person’s actions – which is what unforgiveness does. But, when we forgive, we choose to take responsibility for our own healing, and leave the other person to God.

Who do you need to forgive today? And from whom do you need to ask forgiveness?

**Practice for Today:** The practice of forgiving is not about how we feel. It’s about how we choose to act. We may be hurt or angry at someone, but still choose to act in their best interests, and to seek to love them as best we can. This is the spirit of forgiveness. It is never easy, but it is liberating, and we get better at it over time. This is why it’s called a “practice”. Today, exercise your grace by forgiving as freely and quickly as you can.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I seek to live by grace, O God, I choose to forgive freely and quickly.

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